

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

November 2, 2021

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Criswell,

We are asking for your consideration to remove “preparedness measures and response equipment” from the list of ineligible activities for hazard mitigation assistance (HMA) funding and include such costs as an eligible activity.

Representing rural counties across South and Middle Georgia, we have seen a great need for communities to upgrade their communication systems. There has been a vital communication gap in multiple natural disasters over the last several years as our first responders struggle to communicate with other responders in their county and surrounding counties to better serve those in harm’s way. Several of these disasters have in fact had loss of life, in part due to lack of communication ability.

As the ongoing pandemic has made clear, the digital divide is real and devastating for our rural residents. Without robust broadband service, they are cut off from the technological developments that enable many of their suburban and urban neighbors to piece back together a semblance of normalcy while working and learning and caring for one another remotely. In addition, the lack of sufficient broadband infrastructure puts these communities at further risk when natural disasters strike, leaving them cut off from emergency services.

As you know, effective and reliable emergency communication is essential for first responders and public safety officials to respond to emergencies and disasters. Unfortunately, the cost for many of our rural counties to upgrade to a P25 800 MHz system for their first responders is not feasible as their budgets are much tighter with a smaller tax base. These same counties have been continuously hit by natural disasters and see the need for HMA funding to be used for this equipment to better serve their constituency. However, currently these radios are listed as an ineligible expense.

In FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance Guidance, FEMA notes that “HMA programs reduce community vulnerability to disasters and their effects, promote individual and community safety and resilience, and promote community vitality after an incident.” Hazard mitigation is critical for our communities to reduce the impact of disasters in the future. P25 communication systems are a key component as they reduce vulnerability to the effects of the disaster and promote safety and resilience, which results in safer communities that are less reliant on external financial assistance. Interoperable communications equipment, including P25 radios, align with FEMA’s goals of the HMA programs.

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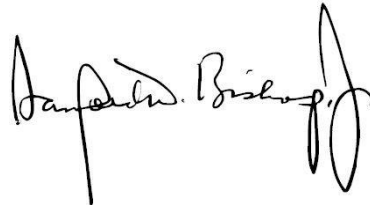
Therefore, we ask for your consideration to include interoperable communications equipment as an eligible expense for those communities that apply for HMA funding following a natural disaster.

We appreciate your full and fair attention of this request and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Austin Scott
Member of Congress



Sanford Bishop
Member of Congress